

# Autism Spectrum Disorder

## What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?



Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) refers to a group of developmental disorders characterized by a range of difficulties with socialization, verbal communication, and repetitive behaviors. A diagnosis of ASD now includes other conditions previously known as Autistic Disorder, Asperger's Syndrome, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified.

## What are signs and symptoms of ASD?

- Unusual or repetitive “stereotypic” behaviors (e.g., rocking back and forth, arm flapping, licking or touching objects, repeating words over and over)
- Restricted and highly specific interests (e.g., preoccupation with certain objects that may be considered unusual)
- Difficulties with unexpected transitions or changes in routines
- Delayed or limited speech and language development
- Poor eye contact or apparent lack of interest in others
- Inappropriate response to affection from others (i.e., anger or anxiety)
- Difficulties knowing and understanding how to respond to social cues
- Facial expressions that may not be consistent with conversation
- Trouble understanding another person's point of view
- Potential for above-average intelligence or exceptional skills in memory, specific subjects, or other unique areas

## How is ASD diagnosed?

Early screening, diagnosis, and intervention is crucial to ensuring that your child can learn vital social and adaptive skills needed to be successful. Parents are encouraged to pay attention to early developmental milestones and to address any concerns with their pediatrician or mental health professional. Pediatricians should also screen for ASD during well child visits. If a concern for developmental problem arises, you may be referred for an additional evaluation by a professional qualified to evaluate ASD.

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## What will an evaluation require?

A comprehensive evaluation is typically conducted over multiple testing sessions and includes completion of behavior checklists and interviews completed by parents, teachers, and other care providers.

Additionally, your child may be asked to complete a set of standardized activities while being observed to assess his/her communication, social interaction, and ability to play and use materials appropriately. Your examiner will rate your child's response to each module, which will aid in determining a possible diagnosis.

Generally, an evaluation will assess the following domains:



## What are treatment options for ASD?

### Behavioral Therapy

Behavioral therapy can help teach your child how to develop certain social and adaptive skills that may be impacted or delayed by ASD. Therapy can also help caregivers learn how to manage emotional and behavioral difficulties that result from ASD symptoms.

### Medication

Your doctor may prescribe medication that can help treat symptoms of ASD including anxiety, inflexibility, poor attention, aggression, etc. Be sure to talk to your doctor about any problematic symptoms to determine the best treatment option.

## Who do I contact to find out more?

Referrals for behavioral therapy and medication management can be made by physicians, mental health professionals, other allied health professionals, or from a patient or family directly.



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